DAWTAS WRITE HERSTORY

A celebration of Caribbean Women's Writing

from **PEEPAL TREE PRESS**

Inside

book reviews
author news
poems
short stories
essays
new titles

FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE

Contents

Introduction 2

The Birth of Women's Time
by Jeremy Poynting 2-3

Women Writers in the Caribbean
by Merle Collins 4-5

The Writers

Beryl Gilroy 6-11
Hazel Campbell 12-13
Rachel Manley 14-15
Velma Pollard 16-17
June Henfrey 18-19
Janice Shinebourne 20-21
Meiling Jin 22-23
Brenda Flanagan 24-25
marina ama omowale maxwell 25-26
Denise Harris 27-28
Mahadai Das 28-29
Lakshmi Persaud 30-31
Narmala Shewcharan 32-34

A Guide to Further Reading 35
Index of Titles & Ordering Information 36

Pull-out Order Form.....centre pages
Trade Information.....back cover

THE BIRTH OF WOMEN'S TIME

"It is a marvel that there have been so many creative women artists in the Caribbean. Too many have fallen silent or been driven underground, smothered by husbands, children or jobs..."

marina ama omowale maxwell

In this respect the struggle from voicelessness to voice for Caribbean women writers appears to be no different to that of women anywhere. The essay by Sandra Courtman (pp 8-9) describing the struggle of Beryl Gilroy to achieve publication is a salutary record of those kinds of pressures to silence. There are, though, some specific barriers to women's creativity which have been rooted in the history of the region, and forms of resistance to those barriers which have given Caribbean women's writing its distinctive voice.

For women of African and Indian origins in particular, the region's long history of slavery and indenture, of colonialism and racial hierarchies, have been experienced in gender-defined ways. Under slavery women were, in addition to being forced to labour, subjected to extreme sexual abuse. Thereafter, women were frequently forced to play the role of family provider in societies where men were economically marginalised. Until quite recently, Indo-Caribbean women had the additional barrier of their own community's attitudes to women's roles, and in particular to their exclusion from educational opportunity. Chandini in Narmala Shewcharan's *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, (see pp 32-34) though the daughter of a headmaster, is forced to reflect bitterly on the denial of her dreams of educational advance.

Yet out of these double or even treble oppressions of race, gender and culture, Caribbean women have created forms of cultural expression which have been and are at the heart of the region's resilience. Not only have women been at the forefront of popular resistance to oppression, but they have been the chief preservers of cultural continuities: the storytellers, the healers and the shapers of community rituals, and it is in this doubleness, occupying the political centre stage at the same time as nurturing the society's growth points, that one sees what is most distinctive about Caribbean women's writing.

Caribbean women's writing has made no attempt to occupy some alternative space separate from the 'male' novel in the way that women's writing in Britain has sometimes done. Virtually all the novels and collections of stories published by Peepal Tree place their events on (or just off) a political stage which shows men and women struggling against the Caribbean's endemic oppressions of poverty and racism and the social violence (frequently turned inwards against women) which is its symptom. Brenda Flanagan's *You Alone Are Dancing*, for instance has its heroine, Beatrice, leading the villagers of Rosehill against expropriation by land speculators. (See p. 24). As much as in male writing, Caribbean women's fiction has been concerned with the connections between past and present. For instance, Hazel Campbell's novella "Jacob Bubbles" in *Singerman*, interweaves the brutal past of slavery with the contemporary Jamaican world of gangsterism and intra-communal violence, in a brilliantly imagined working out of these relationships. June Henfrey's stories in *Coming Home* portray women's lives at key points in Caribbean social change from slavery to the present. In this respect Caribbean women's writing shares the concerns of all the region's writers, irrespective of gender.

By Jeremy Poynting

Managing Editor of Peepal Tree

However, there are a number of features which make women's writing distinctive. One is that whereas male writing tends to portray political activism and personal and family relationships as mutually exclusive, Caribbean women's writing is more inclined to see the separation as negating the value of the political project as well as being destructive of the personal. If male writing tends to present their central (male) characters as isolated and defeated figures, women's writing is more inclined to portray its central characters as being within a web of family and social relationships. It is not surprising then that whilst a good deal of male fiction seems to recoil from Caribbean realities in despair, women's writing has a greater tendency to see the possibilities of regeneration. It is a writing which brings a new sense of ecological wholeness to Caribbean literary expression.

The image which most frequently brings together these connections is the body. Mahadai Das's poem 'Bones', (see p. 29) is a particularly powerful expression of this focus. As the most intimate site of abuse and expresser of inner distress, the body becomes a potent image not only for the fragmentation of the body politic, but also for the depredations increasingly suffered by Caribbean nature. But the body (and the mind) are also capable of remarkable self-repair, particularly when helped by skilled therapeutic hands, and it is through the intervention of women as healers that the possibilities of regeneration are most strikingly invoked. In Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation*, for instance, Nani Dharamdai massages June Lehall back to the wholeness which has been destroyed by the child's experience of the society's racial tensions. Similar images of bodily and psychic distress and subsequent healing are to be found in Denise Harris's *Web of Secrets* and in Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children*.

The connections between the body, healing and social regeneration are made even more explicit in marina ama omowale maxwell's *Chopstix in Mauby* where the main character, Djuna, combines her role as a physical and psychic healer in the African-derived Orisha religion, with her activism in the radical social and political movements which convulsed Trinidad in the late 1960s. *Chopstix in Mauby* also explicitly connects the health of the human body/body politic with the health of the natural world.

Caribbean woman's writing is, then, not a writing of any kind of gender sectarianism or separation. In *Chopstix in Mauby*, for instance, Djuna reaches both towards an "androgyny of consciousness", and finds her most complete expression in her relationships with men, though first she has to escape from the clutches of the oppressive male pride of her husband, Shepherd (see page 26).

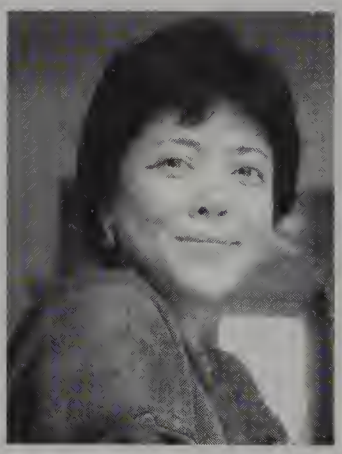
Caribbean women writers have much to say, but like generations of story-telling mothers and grandmothers know that they will only hold their audience's attention if the story is good and the words strike root in their listeners' imaginations. It is hoped that the brief extracts contained in this catalogue begin to suggest the riches available in the books from which they have been taken.

To begin and end with marina maxwell: "We are witnessing the birth of women's time". Peepal Tree is proud to be one of the midwives in this process.

WOMEN WRITERS IN THE CARIBBEAN

The writing coming out of each Caribbean country reflects the diversity and similarity of the region's political and historical experience. The writing of Guyana and Trinidad focuses on the experiences of the African and Asian populations, since the majority of Asians brought into the Caribbean during the latter half of the nineteenth century were taken to work on plantations in Guyana and Trinidad. The political reality in both countries has been much affected by this experience and by the struggle for ascendancy over each other which emerges among oppressed people. In her poem 'Strangers in a Hostile Landscape', Meiling Jin tells the story of this 'plot' called 'colonial-ization' that had taken a people to work on plantations. The poem echoes a theme also explored by Mahadai Das, who spoke of a people who 'came in ships' to a country where their labour was exploited. Janice Shinebourne, too, speaks of this reality in her novels *Timepiece* and *The Last English Plantation,* both of which leave the reader reflecting on the importance of women in the process of change. In much of the writing by Caribbean women, the women play a central role in passing on values to young people, either because men have absconded, or because even when they are there, the women are the ones who concern themselves with such communication. The relationship between mother and daughter, or aunt and niece or guardian and child is a recurring one in Caribbean women's writing, appearing in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey,* Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John,* Zee Endell's *Beka Lamb,* Lorna Goodison's aptly entitled poem *I Am Becoming My Mother* and several other works. In *The Last English Plantation,* Lucille, trying to ensure that young June acquires a good education which would help her to move up the social ladder, is enraged when June announces her desire to leave school. All of her fears resolve themselves into a pronouncement of the racial prejudices which are a part of her isolation and which have been such a divisive factor in Guyanese society:

> *All right! Stay at home then! Turn into a coolie! You used to be a coolie and I manage to turn you into a civilised person, now you want to turn coolie again!*



One of the novel's themes is an exploration of the situation in which the exploited become so steeped in the discourse of their own exploitation that they turn the struggle inward, and fight for an ascendancy over each other. This is essentially an empty struggle in the face of the continuing manifestation of oppression by imperialism and imperialist values. Another Guyanese, Grace Nichols, shows in her novel, *Whole of a Morning Sky,* a consciousness of this futile struggle between African and Asian communities, brought together in the interests of imperial profit. There are echoes of this theme also in the work of the Trinidadian Merle Hodge, where there is the reflection of a constant rejection of Indians particularly on the part of the middle-class African population. But even more fundamental than the racial themes explored is the exploration of the mother/daughter, guardian/young woman

relationship, for the uncovering of that and the examination of the perceptions moving between the generations touches on a part of the collective experience which has to be explored appreciated and understood to allow a new generation to move forward with greater confidence.

Anyone who has read *Lionheart Gal*, written by the *Sistren Theatre Collective* of Jamaica, better still seen and heard the group in performance and presentation, would have experienced the sensation of sharing in the lives of women who have been held within the grip of poverty, alienated by a brutal neocolonial political system, brutalised by the police who also brutalise their men, who in turn brutalise them. Their stories are those of women who have learnt to confront life with the same toughness with which it has confronted them, who want love and tenderness and caring but have learnt to carve a niche which ensures their survival in an unyielding atmosphere. Their experiences have given the strength and resilience which make life possible even while it continues to be a constant struggle:

> *In dose time, when yuh live inna a house in dem areas - even though nobody own di land, man still collect rent. Some landlords very vicious. Some will wait fi dem money, but some a dem all waan lick yuh down. One a di first tings me always remember bout me madda is how she used to deal wid dose landlords. We was living in Greenfield Town and she owe a man some rent. Him come to her to collect di rent like him would a waan say, 'Gimme me rent or come out.' She no say notten at all. She just siddung at di doorway and a listen him. She did have one stone a cotch di door and her hand was inside resting pon di stone. Me siddung a watch her. Di man come and cuss her. Dat time me likkle but someting a boil up inna me like me would a want fi go lick di man..... After a time, me hear di man go way. She turn in di house and she say, 'Yuh lucky, when ah done wid yuh today, yuh wouldn't have a nose lef.'*

The young woman who watches her mother struggle learns lessons, too, for her own existence. Growing up with no father, influenced by her mother's experiences with men, she forms her own ideas.

> *For a long time Caribbean man no reliable. Breed woman an lef dem fi mind pickney. My madda no tek notten fi granted. As she see dem start fool demself, she just leave....*

Caribbean women have only just begun to tell the stories which their mothers have whispered in kitchens, and the constant emergence of these stories, as of the writing of women throughout the world, is a phenomenon explained not only by the fact that the white publishing houses now find this a profitable enterprise and that the Black publishers realise the importance of publishing Black writers, but also by the fact that women have in a very real sense become conscious of the need to explore their experiences from their own perspectives, whether in written form or in the oral presentation particularly popular today within the Black community in Britain. So little has been written and published from a women's perspective in the past, that there is still a tremendous amount waiting to be explored.

Mother Jackman – Bookseller

a short story by Beryl Gilroy, taken from **Sunlight on Sweet Water**

Every three or four months, the bookseller came to our village carrying what she called a 'portmantle'. It was a battered leather case with two rusty, push-in catches, made further secure by a strip of leather tied round it. She walked as though it was very heavy, and she looked like a squarely overdressed giantess, who had suddenly came to life and set about walking the villages to prove her vitality. Her legs seemed to be strong and certain under the weight of her body and the contents of her suitcase. She raised a lot of dust when she walked unhesitatingly up to our front door. With her stock of Weldon's Ladies Journals, from which my aunts avidly copied styles, and hard-covered novels by Marie Corelli, religious books and love stories by Bertha Clay, she would sit with my grandmother beside the arbour. (The arbour was a raised platform on which sweet-scented herbs, trailing plants and flowers grew.) My grandmother would offer her refreshment in the form of sorrel drink, ginger beer or coconut water.

After drinking, she would open her case and reveal the books. My heart would beat rapidly at the smell of the newness embedded deep inside them and, after being warned to take care, I would be allowed to handle them.

I would rapidly turn the pages and encounter the pictures. There, yet again, among the tightly-packed print would be Lucifer and his angels being thrown out of Heaven; Adam and Eve, fig leaves unruffled, standing in a woebegone state outside the Garden of Eden; and Cain, stick raised high in the air as he flagrantly kills brother Abel. The tower of Babel and Jacob, wrestling for all he was worth with the angel, would all be there.

Questions about these pictures would well up in my mind, but if I interrupted, my grandmother would say, 'Obedience is the first law', and the bookseller would bid me go and play. She was a woman of indefinite age, and her mixed race showed in the brown hair pulled over her ears. She always wore a flat-topped felt hat with a black band, and a khaki two-piece suit. The skirt was long and the jacket had a band stitched all the way round, which marked the place where her waist should have been. The outfit concealed her shape and gave credence to the rumours about the dubiousness of her gender.

We all knew that the bookseller had no husband or children because life had 'done her wrong'. Only the adults in the village seemed to know what unspeakable wrong life had done her, but the children simply repeated what they heard parrot-fashion. My cousin said she knew, and if I gave her my best hairgrip, my handkerchief and my hairslide, she would tell me.

The next time the bookseller came, my cousin was roasting coffee beans in the yard, and the bookseller stopped and said she was over-cooking the beans. When she had gone past the arbour and out of earshot, my cousin whispered, 'Maphrodice'. She had a nasty

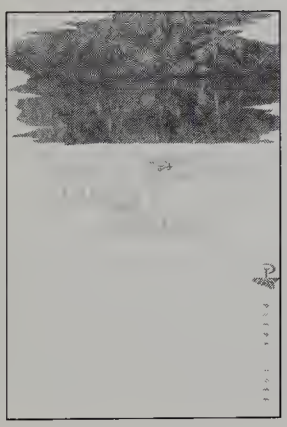
look on her face, and so I knew she meant something nasty, but exactly what I could not say. Rather than confess my ignorance, I tittered in a knowing sort of way. But the term gave me no rest. It was a very perplexing term. Was it an illness, a defect, a disease that I could catch? Was it the ability to bewitch or haunt? It was not in my Little Gem dictionary, or so I thought, since I did not know how to spell such a word.

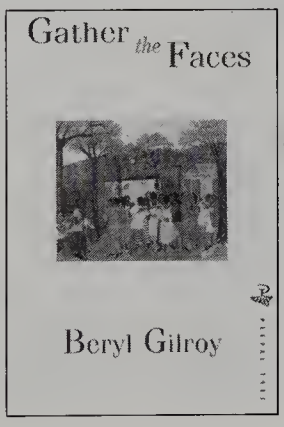
After some self-mortification, I ventured a question to my grandmother. 'What is "maphrodice"?' I said. At the sound of the word a dark look came over her face. Later, very much later, I was to learn that it was the Creole word for a hermaphrodite, and it was a term hurled at any middle-aged unattached man or woman. Children called one another that as an insult when there were no adults about, and everyone always laughed.

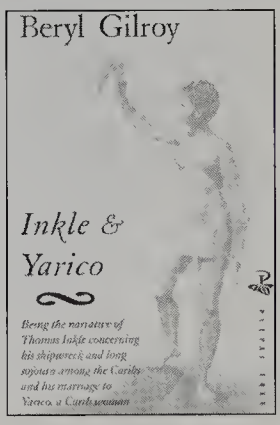
'That's no word for children,' said my grandmother after a long pause, and then, as if drawing the answer from among a tangle of discretions, she replied, 'You will know soon enough, so I better tell you. The world will never be done with her. It will never get her in the first place.' It took me another five years and nature study lessons on flowers, slugs, and earthworms to really find out what hermaphrodite meant. But since they called the bookseller Miss Jackman and Mother Jackman, I am sure that no one in the village really doubted her gender. She did not have both organs, nor did she choose what gender to be. She was a woman, and dropped dead getting off the bus after one of her visits. There was much sadness at the news. The older folk sat up half the night remembering her, and I took out my favourite book bought off her, and read my favourite pages over again. The book was called 'Barabas'. I must have been seven years old at the time.

I am still eager to find out why I read about Barabas on the cross when I heard of Miss Jackman's death.

'Mother Jackman — Bookseller' is taken from Beryl Gilroy's collection of short stories *Sunlight on Sweet Water.* Full details of this and her other books are on pages 10 and 11.







On Becoming a Published Caribbean Woman Writer in Britain: Beryl Answick Gilroy

By Sandra Courtman

Beryl Gilroy arrived in London in 1951, a bright student, a polished colonial subject, and a Crown Agent. She was one of those vetted intellectuals that the pre-independent West Indies dispatched for finishing at a British university. As part of an elite group, she danced and debated with her contemporaries at the British Council hostel for overseas students. Beryl Gilroy was nourished by readings from Shakespeare and by the friendship of pioneering West Indian scholars, Linda Robeson and Sylvia Wynter. She heard Dylan Thomas read in a London pub. The fun ended when she stepped outside of this charmed circle. The newly arrived West Indians found their relationship with the British public constructed on historical ignorance. Journeying through London was often harrowing; Beryl's colour and beauty provoked racial abuse and sexual harassment. Gilroy fought this virulent strain of racism, sexism and ignorance to gain legitimate employment as the first black woman teacher in London. These battle years included work as a washer-up at Joe Lyons restaurant, factory work, and a spell as a Lady's maid. The combination of acute observation and the opportunities provided by mobility through the British class system was to form part of her education as a writer. *Black Teacher* evidences her ability to represent the nuances of speech and behaviour that make this autobiography not only a unique record, but an extraordinary piece of writing. Britain recently honoured Beryl Gilroy for her services as a black educationalist; she remains little known and rarely critiqued as a writer. The ease with which *Black Teacher* was published in 1976, solicited after a piece broadcast on BBC radio, is at odds with Gilroy's other efforts to become published. The attention *Black Teacher* receives (recently reprinted) forms part of a distorted view of her development as a creative writer. Her publishing record with its false chronology, would indicate that she has become a prolific writer in the last ten years. What is not evident is that much of her most recently published work was previously rejected. Fortunately she kept the rejected manuscripts for over thirty years.

In the 'fifties, students from the West Indies were transient, and Gilroy planned to return to British Guiana or move to the States. By the 'sixties the love of a tall Englishman had intervened and she became that rare species: a black woman isolated in suburbia with two small children. In suburbia, she was cut off from the intellectual life and the artistic stimulation provided by the activities of The Caribbean Artists Movement (1966-1972). Meanwhile her male contemporaries were "getting into bed with the right people" and gaining

access to the white publishing world. There was no one quite like her and no one to provide the sort of guidance she desperately needed to develop as a writer. Judging her writing in terms of the conventional novel form was entirely inappropriate. Gilroy wanted her British born children to have knowledge of their historical roots and of a type of community that had vanished forever. In *Sunlight on Sweet Water* she captures a Guyanese village life which existed before the profound and irreversible changes of tourism and global capitalism. She sent the manuscript of *Sunlight on Sweet Water* "everywhere" before placing it a safe place. The publishers were not interested. It had to wait thirty years for publication, along with *In Praise of Love and Children* for company, which finally sees the light of day this year.

There were many barriers to her becoming a published creative writer, but shortage of talent was not one of them. Gilroy always wrote poetry but in the 'sixties poetry was a male stronghold and even by 1976 when James Berry edited *Bluefoot Traveller: an anthology of West Indian poets in Britain,* it contained no contributions from women. Berry was later to express regret that he rejected a poem by Gilroy. The poem was good but he felt it would have looked out of place in this anthology. Gilroy's work being 'out of place' was a recurring problem. It often did not quite fit market interests and publishers' lists. Products of the 'sixties displayed an obsession with the new found freedom to represent sexual experience, pregnancy and abortion, Gilroy's work contained none of these. Not surprisingly she suffered a loss of creativity, but she was encouraged by Andrew Salkey and Anne Walmsley to fill a void that existed in writing for children. There was also the ambivalent position of the newly published male West Indians which placed them as advisors and readers for publishers. These readers were finding their own voice and negotiating a cultural space. They rejected the work of Gilroy, criticising it on the one hand for being colonial and unknowing, and on the other for being psychological and strange; discouragement that might have finished her writing career forever. Rejections produce silence. Except that Beryl Gilroy is descended from a long line of Berbice rebels; often silenced, they know how to wait.

Sandra Courtman February 1996

Based on unpublished papers and a series of interviews and discussions with Dr Gilroy: London, June 1995 – February 1996, and on a discussion with James Berry, London, June 25, 1995.

Beryl Gilroy

Beryl Gilroy ~ The New Books

In Praise of Love and Children

new

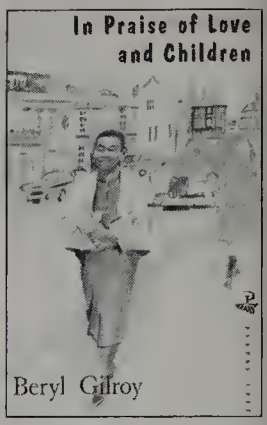
Beryl Gilroy

After false starts in teaching and social work, Melda Hayley finds her mission in fostering the damaged children of the first generation of black settlers in a deeply racist Britain.

But though Melda finds daily uplift in her work, her inner life starts to come apart. Her brother Arnie has married a white woman and his defection from the family and the distress Melda witnesses in the children she fosters causes her own buried wounds to weep.

Melda confronts the cruelties she has suffered as the "outside child" at the hands of her stepmother. But though the past drives Melda towards breakdown, she finds strengths there too, especially in the memories of the loving, supporting women of the yards. And there is Pa who, in his new material security in the USA, discovers a gentle caring side and teaches his family to sing in praise of love and children.

ISBN 0948833 89 0 £6.95 out July 1996



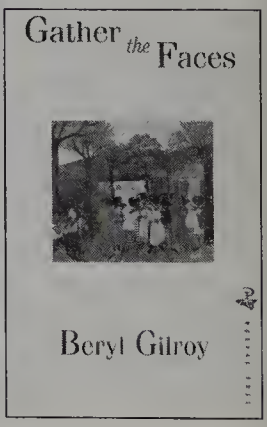
Gather the Faces

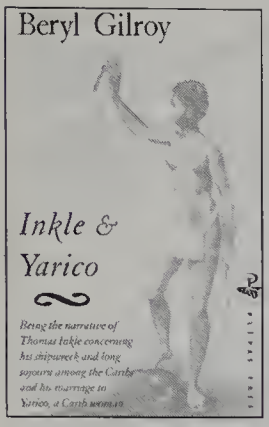
new

Beryl Gilroy

Marvella Payne is twenty-seven, works as a secretary for British Rail and has pledged to the congregation of the Church of the Holy Spirit that she will abstain from sex before marriage. When she repulses the groping hands of the trainee-deacon, Carlton Springle, she resigns herself to growing old with her mother, father and Bible-soaked aunts. But Aunt Julie has other ideas and finds Marvella a penfriend from her native Guyana. When good fortune allows the couple to meet, Marvella awakens to new possibilities as she realises how bound she has been by the voices of her dependent, cossetted childhood. But will marriage be another entrapment, another loss of self?

ISBN 0948833 88 2 £5.95 out July 1996





Inkle and Yarico

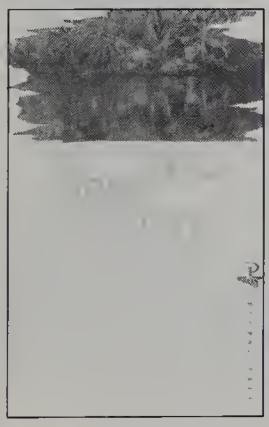
new

Beryl Gilroy

As a young man of twenty, Thomas Inkle sets out for Barbados to inspect the family sugar estates. On the way he is shipwrecked on a small West Indian island inhabited by Carib Indians. He alone escapes as his shipmates are slaughtered, and is rescued by Yarico, a Carib woman who takes him as, "an ideal, strange and obliging lover." So begins an encounter, which has a profound effect on both. Amongst the Caribs, Inkle's survival depends entirely on Yarico's protection. But when he is rescued and taken with Yarico to the slave island of Barbados, she is entirely at his mercy.

Inkle and Yarico is loosely based on a "true" story which became a much repeated popular narrative in the 17th and 18th centuries. Beryl Gilroy reinterprets its mythic dimensions from both a woman's and a black perspective, but above all she engages the reader in the psychological truths of her characters' experiences.

ISBN 0948833 98 X £6.95 out in July 1996



Sunlight on Sweet Water

Beryl Gilroy

Beryl Gilroy transports the reader back to the Guyanese village of her childhood to meet such characters as Mr Dewsbury the Dog Doctor, Mama Darlin' the village midwife and Mr Cumberbatch the Chief Mourner.

It was a time when 'childhood had not yet disappeared', and perhaps for this reason, the men and women who pass through these stories have a mystery and singularity which are as unforgettable for the reader as they were for the child. Beryl Gilroy brings back to life a whole, rich Afro-Guyanese community.,

Sunlight on Sweet Water is fast becoming a Peepal Tree best-seller and is widely taught on women's and Caribbean literature courses.

ISBN 0948833 64 5 £5.95 out now

Review of Singerman

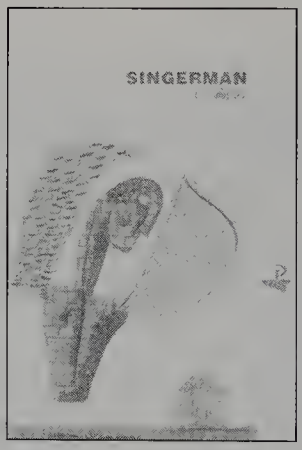
by Keith Jardim, in The Caribbean Writer, vol 8

The excellence of Hazel D. Campbell's short stories lies not only in the bright, robust prose of her third and latest collection, *Singerman,* but also in her portrayals of the preoccupations of the Caribbean people, race, class, and poverty – how they have cursed the region.

In "Don't Colour Me," perhaps my favourite in the collection, the curse of the region (George Lamming recently said that no serious writer of the Caribbean can avoid the issues of race and class) is given disturbing clarity. Sara, a young English woman, just another prize in her husband Clifton's collection (the massive house, the luxury foreign car, the pedigreed dogs), wants to adopt a child she has met at a school where she teaches art to deaf children.

Clifton, like so many Caribbean men, expresses his appreciation of women by giving them expensive gifts. It's the pimp's idea of love. Campbell has Sara reflect:

> Sara was wondering what her husband was up to now. He was like a little boy with a big secret, always a sign that he had some spectacular treat in store for her. Like the time he'd bought her the large diamond and ruby ring for her birthday. Just like Charles might give Diana, he'd said proudly. She wore it only on rare occasions and only to please him. He would beam with pride when people exclaimed at the ring and urge her to show off her finger; she would want to die of embarrassment.



The bond between Sara and the child is real; it's *love* (another concern of Campbell), something so lacking in Clifton's mansion of servants and comforts of every kind. There is the suggestion here that intimacy, real love, is impossible in a situation like Clifton's and Sara's. And to say that this story sums up some of the major problems of race and class, of those who have and have not, is an understatement: it sets them aflame. Especially when we see Clifton, so pompous and ignorant, so full of hate for his own people and thus himself, cruelly rejecting Sara's wish to adopt the child.

"What!" he explodes. "That little black, ugly, deaf pickney!

Never!" But Sara knows how to say no too.

In "Mama Pala," the sadness, the utter debilitations of poverty come together – fittingly again – against the larger social context. It's about why the poor are poor and why they remain poor, and why in poverty, only quick fixes are possible, usually accompanied by humiliation. Mama Pala knows this, yet her spirit does not falter completely. She triumphs somewhat by being able to continue to feed her children for a while longer, and by giving them a gift – a television – the monster that will cause them to make even more demands on her in the future. Campbell gives the whole picture.

In "Singerman," inspired mostly by David Rudder's "Haiti," Campbell, in what many writers would devote a novel to, shows how that island was wronged and how, exotically and mindlessly now, we continue that wrong against ourselves – the entire Caribbean. This story is powerful

in its mixture of tale, prose poem, and story effects. From Haiti's birth it jumps to what appears to be present day Trinidad of useless government and misled citizenry, showing how we still contribute to our own downfall, unable or unwilling to break away from the play of history.

Despite a problem I had with "Version," all of these stories are beautifully written, wise, and sweeping in moral concerns.

Singerman
Hazel Campbell

Realistic and magical, sombre and deeply comic, heroic and full of ironies, these stories explore the complexities of Caribbean reality through a variety of voices and forms. Campbell writes with an acute perception of the ways in which racism, sexism and poverty can maim the spirit, but the overarching vision of this book is of the redemptive power of love and the Caribbean peoples' capacity to rise out of enslavements old and new.

'...uniquely magical stories... the poetry of her stories is concretely and lovingly Jamaican...'
Liberation

ISBN 0948833 44 0 £4.95 out now

Hazel Campbell writes:

I was a child of the 1940s when nationalism was raising its head in Jamaica (as in other colonial countries), I attended schools where patriotism and the budding political movements were regarded as extremely important. In spite of the pervasive use of foreign texts, we were encouraged to think Jamaican. This consciousness has remained with me to the extent that I get physically uncomfortable if I am away from Jamaica for too long a time. Perhaps that's why I never migrated and why my work reflects almost a 'romantic' view of Jamaica – its people, landscape and the very peculiar aura which makes it difficult to understand; difficult to live in; but nevertheless such an enchanting country.

A Review of Rachel Manley's *A Light Left On*

taken from the *Caribbean Review of Books* written by Louis Simpson

The poems of Rachel Manley in *A Light Left On* are like Chopin preludes. A moment in a garden, a night with rain playing on the roof.

There is regret for the Edenic, vanished world of a family. Sometimes she writes forcefully, as in the poem titled "Cropover":

Now they have cut the canes
and I don't know whether
they leave
like Jews hoarded off to
Treblinka,
or protesting children
to Sunday school,
but the land is gross and torn
and I am afflicted.

Rachel Manley uses standard English, but I cannot imagine a more "Jamaican" poem than "Cropover". The essential thing, however, is that it is poetry of a high order. Questions of identity may be interesting but they are not essential.

The longest poem in *A Light Left On* is dedicated to the poet Rilke and evokes the volatile images and compaction of language in the *Duino Elegies*. Manley's brief lyrics can be enchanting, but "Raron" is on a higher level of achievement altogether: the poetry is not just personal. It moves into a larger world, the arena of myths and legends: The speaker is climbing one of the Alps and arrives at a graveyard. "Is it only the old who climb this mountain/pacing their weakened steps up the quiet path?"

Pass through the gate, it neither opens
nor shuts: only the body folds
its curtains behind. Consider the rose
who begins her journey closed.
Come to the lawn of beds, each resting
brave tucked into the sum of his worth.
A host of crosses turns at the sound of steps
their arms outreached like mendicants
beseeching memory for each one's
mute constituent. They mark the place
where man's imagination left its luggage
as it journeyed on.

I look forward to the poems Rachel Manley may write as she gains confidence and moves, as in "Raron", beyond the lyric to express all that she knows and can imagine.

Rachel Manley

Only the Moon

Dawn breaks,
but the world is not in half.
I am here,
hung from my beginning,
fed slowly by my death.
men wander the earth
like fingers of a tribe
circling their hand,
plundering their own dream.
here the morning papers tell
the terror of the night we shared
when the moon
was the only light left on.

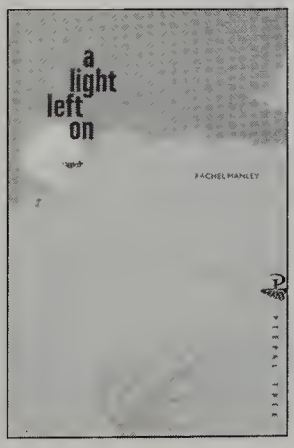
A Light Left On
Rachel Manley

Rachel Manley's poems explore loss and grief in a life-enhancing way. They confront this most universal of experiences with an exactness to feeling, in language which is simple on the surface and complex in its depths. Death is no terrifying abstraction, but part of life and love, humanised through its associations with the particular. Life is always present in the richly evoked Caribbean world.

Rachel Manley has published two previous collections of poetry: *Prisms* (1972) and *Poems Two* (1981). She was born and grew up in Jamaica. She now lives in Canada.

'A Light Left On... reveals the rich lyricism of her verse, the musicality of her voice, and the clarity and enduring optimism of her vision'.
The Caribbean Writer

ISBN 0948833 55 6 £4.95 out now



Velma Pollard

Velma Pollard

Su Su

Susu su su Susu su su
among the yellow poui
you hear
I hear
leaves in the Japanese garden
'tiday fi mi tumaro fi yu'
like Brer Anancy talking in his nose
Susu su su

And how I laughed that day
I heard them say
'im shouldn bury there
im a go come back fi dem have no fear'
denying all the rural wisdom I had known...

Then quick and fast
some hidden hit man
strikes us off our anxious lists
and you
and I
stand open-mouthed
as poui leaves whisper just before they fall

tiday fi mi
tumaro fi yu
Susu su su
Susu su su

A review by Marvin E. Williams

Tone and emotion range wide in Velma Pollard's *Shame Trees Don't Grow Here... but poincianas bloom* – from disgust, anger and outrage to celebration, awe and praise; from questioning and condemnation to understanding and reconciliation. The major thrust of the poet's fire comes in the first part of the book where those who lacked or are lacking conscience and moral boundaries are drawn into Pollard's unflinching scrutiny. Wildfire becomes hearth in part two where the beauty and life-enhancing qualities of land, sea, and people are celebrated.

Throughout, the poet's skilful use of language remains evident in, for example, her subtle, unobtrusive rhymes that lend musicality to her verse; her puns; double entendres; and other word play. Consider, then, this extract from "Foreign II":

three meals
and shelter
language too
for Prospero(us) Massa
lent his tongue...
and what had he to gain
except to hear
and comprehend the pain
where yesterday he heard
and only mumbled
Babel-land again?

Even with and beyond anger and outrage, then, there remains a playfulness in Pollard's language that flirts at satire but courts the innocence which manages to endure within the land/seascapes. Accordingly, in "Drakes's Strait Remembered" the poet finds awe in:

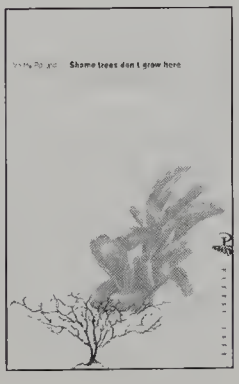
rocks you can almost touch
that stand and speak to rock
and islets bobbing

out of nowhere
to become
a green girl in the ring
tra la la la laa

The but poincinas bloom segment of the text might be viewed as a pause for appreciation – in the sense of both understanding and gratefulness – of nuances, shades of beauty and strength within individuals and environment; there is especially appreciation for friends who have provided comfort and for the sea that makes and perpetually endows islands. The allegorical prose poem, "Forestfire," that introduces the section embodies its mood. After "a large unconscionable fire raced its Revelation," the speaker/poet discovers that out of this destruction of green and brown had emerged a "beauty other different but beauty still."

The winner of the 1992 Casas de las Americas prize for literature, Velma Pollard has also written *Crown Point and Other poems* (1988) and *Considering Woman* (1989), a collection of short stories and sketches.

Marvin E. Williams St. Croix



Crown Point and Other Poems

Velma Pollard

Crown Point is the first and long overdue collection of poems by one of the Caribbean's foremost poets. Velma Pollard's poems range from affectionate and observant family portraits to the righteous anger of an Afro-Caribbean woman's truth telling, and to tender elegiac poems of loss and remembrance. The latter in particular have an eloquent stillness at their heart, a stoic, life-enhancing dignity. All Velma Pollard's poems share a common depth of reflection and concern with poetic craft.

ISBN 0948833 24 6 £4.95

Shame Trees Don't Grow Here

Velma Pollard

A shame tree is a Jamaican symbol for the development of moral consciousness, and the poems in this collection explore the points at which moral values emerge – and the consequences of their absence. The poems suggest toughly that such consciousness does not grow without unremitting effort and scrupulous sensitivity to feeling, but there is nothing didactic or moralistic about them. They are imaginative recreations of the dramas of coming to consciousness and the inevitable ambiguities of truth. As in all Velma Pollard's work, there is a deeply imbued sense of Caribbean history.

ISBN 0948833 48 3 £4.95

June Henfrey *author of Coming Home and other stories*

In memory of June Henfrey

Peepal Tree attended a moving ceremony at Blackburne House Women's Technology Centre in Liverpool in1994 to take part in the opening of the new Centre and the launch of June Henfrey's collection of short stories, *Coming Home*. June Henfrey was born in Barbados in 1939, and eventually settled in Liverpool where she helped found the Women's Technology Centre.

Sadly, in 1991, June discovered that she had cancer. She returned to Barbados more frequently and began writing the six stories collected in *Coming Home*. She died in 1993 but her memory survives in the naming of the June Henfrey Library at Blackburne House and in the stories, which we felt honoured to publish.

From a review by Chris Searle in the *Morning Star*

June Henfrey, who died in 1993, spent much of her life in Liverpool, where she pioneered many black community projects, including the Liverpool Women's Technology Scheme.

But as the stories in *Coming Home* testify, she was also a powerful and accomplished writer.

She writes with a beautiful lyricism of the Barbadian canefields, the implacable setting of her stories:

> *Living Cane was his world. He loved the pale green shoots that showed above the black earth*

"Living cane was his world. He loved the pale green shoots that showed above the black earth soon after planting. Later, the half-grown plants would whisper together in the wind and rain. Later still, the fleecy silver-grey arrow fronds would wave and sigh in the year's turning."

Inside this plantation world, her people dream and struggle. In her memorable story, *The Gully*, Quashebah, a slave who is raped and made pregnant by her overseer, flees and seeks sustenance for her secret dreams of freedom in a limestone cave, where she finds both welcome and protection.

A particularly deep-rooted story is *Freedom Come*, telling of Nanny, one of the enthusiasts and mobilisers of Bussa's slave rebellion in Barbados in 1816.

Henfrey's portrait, convincing and assured, is of an "old African who had never yielded to the fact of her enslavement."

All her characters are of this mettle, whether born of slavery, colonialism or migration, and June Henfrey's stories have left us the words and spirit of a writer and woman whose life and creative impulse was ever to seek freedom and betterment for her people on two sides of an ocean.

Order Form

Fiction

Campbell, Hazel — ***Singerman*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Flanagan, Brenda — ***You Alone are Dancing*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Gilroy, Beryl — ***Gather the Faces*** — QTY

£5.95 US$10.50 CAN$13.00 — TOTAL

Gilroy, Beryl — ***Inkle and Yarico*** — QTY

£6.95 US$12.00 CAN$15.00 — TOTAL

Gilroy, Beryl — ***In Praise of Love and Children*** — QTY

£6.95, US$12.00 CAN$15.00 — TOTAL

Gilroy, Beryl — ***Sunlight on Sweet Water*** — QTY

£5.95, US$11.50 CAN$13.00 — TOTAL

Please turn >>>

Order Form

Harris, Denise	***Web of Secrets***		QTY
	£6.95	US$12.00 CAN$15.00	TOTAL
Henfrey, June	***Coming Home and other Stories***		QTY
	£5.95	US$10.50 CAN$13.00	TOTAL
Jin, Meiling	***Song of the Boatwoman***		QTY
	£6.95	US$12.00 CAN$15.00	TOTAL
maxwell, marina	***Chopstix in Mauby***		QTY
	£6.95	US$12.00 CAN$15.00	TOTAL
Persaud, Lakshmi	***Butterfly in the Wind***		QTY
	£5.95	US$10.50 CAN$13.00	TOTAL
Persaud, Lakshmi	***Sastra***		QTY
	£5.95	US$10.50 CAN$13.00	TOTAL
Shewcharan, Narmala	***Tomorrorrow is Another Day***		QTY
	£6.95	US$12.00 CAN$15.00	TOTAL

Order Form

Shinebourne, Janice — ***The Last English Plantation*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Shinebourne, Janice — ***Timepiece*** — QTY

£4.50 US$8.00 CAN$10.00 — TOTAL

Poetry

Das, Mahadai — ***Bones*** — QTY

£3.95 US$7.00 CAN$8.50 — TOTAL

Manley, Rachel — ***A Light Left On*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Pollard, Velma — ***Crown Point*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Pollard, Velma — ***Shame Trees Don't Grow Here*** — QTY

£4.95 US$8.50 CAN$11.00 — TOTAL

Please turn >>>

Please add postage:

55p UK, **$1.50** US, **$2.00** CAN **per book**

TOTAL

Grand Total:

TOTAL

We can accept payment by cheque, postal order or international money order. **Please enclose your payment with this form**.

Please send the books to:

Name
Address
Postal/Zip Code
Country

Please pull out this form and return it with your payment to:

Peepal Tree Press,
17, King's Avenue, Leeds LS6 1QS, United Kingdom
telephone 44 (0)113 2451703 fax 44 (0)113 2468368
email: hannah@peepal.demon.co.uk

The Gully

an extract from the short story by June Henfrey
taken from Coming Home and other Stories

She pressed on, realising that she had to make full use of the darkness to put still more distance between herself and the plantation. Bit by bit the rain abated and presently she found that she was making good progress in what was now no more than a drizzle. Feeling her way, since it was too dark to see very much, and with that heightened sense of the outdoor world which her African village childhood had developed in her, she came upon a rocky outcrop overhung with bushy shrubs. On examination, it proved to be almost completely dry on its leeward side and there, in a cleft in the rock face, she lay down to rest and await the thinning of the darkness.

She slept, and when she awoke in the wan light of early foreday morning, the rain had ceased completely. It had left a dripping world in which every hollow had become a pond, and a land that was normally free of running water suddenly seemed to be criss-crossed by streams. Though her temporary resting place had served her well, she knew that it was neither safe nor remote enough to shelter her for long. Rousing herself and pausing only to take a bite of yam and a mouthful of water scooped from a shallow depression on the topside of the rock, she set off in the hope of finding a more wooded and broken terrain.

Her luck held. Before it was fully light, she had reached a landscape of small gullies and caves, sufficiently broken and undulating to confuse pursuers but with enough vegetation to afford both shade and concealment. The main gully when she found it was a stroke of luck. Its entrance was a large pothole partly concealed by the branches of trees whose roots were below, in the gully. The sides, though steep, were manageable, with hand and footholds provided by the branches and protruding bits of rock. When she had lowered herself down to what she thought was the bottom she discovered that this was only a ledge partially overhanging the pothole shaft which dropped, half as deep again, to the true bottom. Here, about a hundred feet from where she had started on the surface she found herself in a wide, natural chamber which sloped gradually back into the bedrock at its far end, with galleries leading off from either side. She looked for and found a dry cave along the gallery on the chamber's darker side, and noticed as she did so that among the abundant trees and bushes there were some whose fruit she knew to be edible. They strengthened her sense of being welcomed and protected by the gully, despite the pains she was now feeling.

Coming Home and Other Stories

June Henfrey

In the fields of whispering sugar cane, the rugged Atlantic coast of crashing breakers and the womb-like gullies of Barbados, the characters in these stories find a landscape which mirrors their inner lives. From Nanny, who cannot bear another day's captivity when rumour's of slavery's abolition reach the island, to Hilda returning home after many years in Britain, these are strong and moving portrayals of women attempting to define themselves in situations where power is determined by race and gender.

ISBN 0948833 67 X £5.95 out now

Dualities – Janice Shinebourne's Timepiece

The title of Janice Shinebourne's important first novel directs the reader to two notions of time, one personal, the other public. On a personal level it portrays people's lives over a carefully chosen number of years. Publicly, it is about a historical moment crucial to Guyanese history and politics. Other dualities abound: between town and country, male and female, between generations and rival political ideologies.

Sandra Yansen, the novel's heroine, grows up in Pheasant, a village in Berbice, with New Amsterdam as its closest town. Sandra's parents, Helen and Ben, and their friends, Noor, Nurse, Miss K and Zena, are all unforgettable. Her education takes her to New Amsterdam then to Georgetown to work as a trainee reporter. She is plunged into the middle of an ideological battle for control of the newspaper and witnesses the defeat of freedom of the press at the hands of the state.

She catches glimpses of Guyanese society of the early 60's, has one abortive and one lasting courtship and returns in the end to Pheasant to nurse her dying mother and eventually bury both her parents.

The novel's structure widens this straightforward narrative. A prelude shows a mature Sandra returning to a deserted Pheasant. The big estate around which Pheasants's life revolved is overrun with weeds, the cottages too. All the people Sandra is able to recall are forgotten.

When the novel opens with a bustling village there is irony and tension because it is underpinned with this knowledge of its dramatic decay. The surrendering of Pheasant to the bush is convincing because the jungle is presented on the fringes of village life.

One of the central dualities of the novel is that of the differing world view of town and country people. A similar duality is brought to the surface when David Petrie, a Trinidadian, visits Pheasant. He sees nothing positive in the place, just silence, flat country and jungle. Sandra by contrast, born and bred there, is cued into its teeming life. The sharp evocation of the landscape, internalised in her, becomes for the reader a rich sensual experience.

In Georgetown there is complacency and cynicism, an atrophied notion of the past and

Timepiece

Jan Shinebourne

Sandra Yansen leaves behind the close ties of family and village when she takes a job as a reporter in Georgetown. The novel explores the connections between personal and political integrity in a society where people 'break up the ground under each other's feet', and reflects sensitively on the position of women in Guyanese society. *Timepiece* won the 1987 Guyana Prize for a first novel.

'This is not a novel to be taken at face value for its joy lies in the fact that it works on so many different levels... the subtleties and tensions of life are not far from the surface as the author questions the notions of political as well as individual dependence and independence.'

Anne Jordan, *Spare Rib*

ISBN 0 948833 03 3 £4.50 out now

a wild optimism about the future. The inhabitants suffer from self-doubt, paranoia, and "no philosophy". If Guyana, according to one of the Pheasant people, T, is two countries, rural and urban, and Georgetown people see "Guiana as two countries too: the high colour fair-skin' middle class and swarthy or 'dark' working-class", then a third duality exists, this time between the people in terms of sex. The relationship between Son Young and Sandra provides the arena for an exploration, in depth, of the relationship between the sexes. Men assume a chauvinistic superiority over women. Sandra and Son get beyond this after an initial battle. They clear the debris and mystery between the sexes in a way which the fiction the young men read never manages to do though it is feminist (Simone de Beauvoir) and existentialist (Camus).

There is remarkable affinity between the authorial voice and the heroine's. Often the author's powerful grasp of the landscape, her ability to imagine it as a sensual experience is mirrored by Sandra's way of seeing and remembering. All the senses are at work, creating a place the author knows intimately.

Timepiece sets out to put right a rhetorical question it poses at the end of its pages: So what of Ben? Was there no dirge that could mourn his death, no song celebrate the life he had invested in this stranded and exploited village?

Timepiece itself does that. The epigraph to the novel is further testimony to these unsung lives:

For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs. (George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

When the women of Pheasant came to Helen's house at night to talk "long past midnight", the girl "they would shoo away when as a child she wanted to listen, saying they were talking 'big people story'" could very well be the adult imagination at work shedding light on their lives, thereby recovering a valuable past for posterity and enriching our lives in the process.

The Last English Plantation
Jan Shinebourne

Merle Collins writes: 'Janice Shinebourne captures the language of movement, mime, silences, glances, with a feeling that comes from being deep within the heart of the Guyanese community. In *The Last English Plantation,* her achievement lies in having the voices of the New Dam villagers dominate the politically turbulent period of 1950s Guyana. Through the eyes of the villagers come images of Georgetown politicians, invading British soldiers, plantation life and attitudes to the Asian and African inheritance. A wonderful and stimulating voyage into the lives behind the headlines, into the past that continues creating the changing present. The voices of the New Dam villagers never leave you.'

ISBN 0 948833 13 0 £4.95 out now

Song of the Boatwoman

new

Meiling Jin

'...She felt like a bird in a cage with the door open. Was she going to fly out?'

Alice, like the other women in Meiling Jin's stories, is at a point of change: Li li is pregnant, alone and frightened at the 'School for Perfect Secretaries'; Gladys plots revenge against her racist neighbour; Margret, taking a trip back home to Malaysia, doesn't know if she can tell her mother that she is a lesbian; Hazel is not sure if her future lies with Sandra and 'a loving which scared her'.

Whether her scene is London, China, California, Malaysia or the Caribbean, whether writing with unwavering and painful realism, wicked humour or lyrical imagination, Meiling Jin takes us inside the lives and experiences of her characters in ways which cannot help but involve the reader.

Each has a journey to make, each their song to sing. Female or male, lesbian or straight, black or white, we are all in some part boatwomen.

Meiling Jin was born in Guyana in 1963, she now lives in London. She is the author of *Gifts from My Grandmother*, a collection of poetry published by Sheba, and stories for children. She is also a playwright and film maker.

ISBN 0948833 86 6 £6. 95 out now

On Writing — Meiling Jin

Why I write is not difficult to answer. I refer to it in an earlier poem. 'I write because I have to, because I want to.' In other words, I write mainly from compulsion. Not only this, I find it empowering and I enjoy the art of story-telling. In another incarnation, I would certainly choose not to write because in the present state of the art, writing is extremely demanding and not in the least rewarding. Added to which, I constantly get the urge to toss all my efforts on the 'bonfire of the vanities' because it can be that too. Nonetheless, there are some exceptionally good story-tellers out here; people who aim to carry you along with the story and who truly only come alive in the telling of the story. This is what keeps me writing and creating characters who I then have trouble getting rid of.

That's how it is.

The Tall Shadow

an extract from the short story by Meiling Jin taken from ***Song of the Boatwoman***

She saw the shadow when she reached the standpipe. At first she thought it was her own, but when she looked behind, she saw her own, and when she looked in front, the shadow, the other shadow, hovered as if it was waiting for her. Maralyn's heart skipped a beat. She threw the bucket on the ground and stepped backwards.

'Me na want nuttin to do with jumbie.'

The shadow approached her and, even as she backed away, it reached her because it was a tall shadow. Maralyn forgot.

She followed the shadow through the gate, across the ditch and down the road. The day's heat had lost some of its relentlessness and was giving way to a cooler evening. Coconut trees shimmered in the late afternoon sun, but Maralyn was not aware of it. On she walked, past Teacher Thomas' house with the red flamboyant guarding the gate, past the baker shop, past the donkey in the field, the church; and so on. She may have heard the frogs croaking in the ditch, or the kiskadee in full song, and then possibly she did not, because all she knew was the shadow.

The house stood well back from the road surrounded by trees: coconut, mango and guava. It was large and you could tell it was well kept because someone had taken the trouble to paint it recently. One hand on the banister, Maralyn climbed the stairs to the front door. She opened the door and went in without knocking. It was already evening. The jalousies were shut, to keep the shadows in.

At first she thought the gallery was empty: then she saw him hovering, like his shadow, by the jalousie, an old man, medium height, grey hair, large ears and a hooked nose. His skin was smooth and dark brown like old leather.

As his shadow returned to him, Maralyn remembered. Her eyes adjusted to the light and took in the gallery in a glance: polished wooden floor, rocking chair, Berbice chair, full length mirror, Chinese screen, long low table. Everything had an exactness about it, like the exact amount of furniture. There was no clutter, except perhaps the photographs, too many photographs.

Maralyn watched the old man warily, mindful of all the stories of jumbies and die-dies.

'Maralyn?' he said.

The sound of his voice made her jump. 'Who you is?' she said, hiding her fear.

He seemed to sink into the shadows. 'Sultan,' he replied. 'My name's Sultan.'

She grew bold. 'How you know my name?'

An extract from You Alone are Dancing by Brenda Flanagan

'I own this land,' Chow's arm swept the hillside. 'I own Rosehill, girl. Don't play with me. You make yourself a leader up here. Buying up leases for people. You playing with me?'

'Is long time now you trying to steal this land,' Miss Ann called out, wanting desperately to move closer so she could hear what the doctor and Beatrice were saying, but she couldn't break the human fence she and the others had made in front of the gate. 'Ever since you used to work in your father's shop, I know you have your mind set on this land. Now you is doctor you think you could move we? You and who?'

'I don't have to stand here and argue with you people,' Chow said. 'I own this property. Tell Roberts to get off or...'

'Or what?' Beatrice asked quietly. 'What you could do?'

'I trying hard to be reasonable with all you. I...'

'Reasonable! You calling yourself reasonable? A man like you!'

'I didn't come here for no argument,' Chow took a step back to avoid the spit flying from Beatrice's angry mouth. 'I telling you for the last time tell these people to move.'

'You come. You move we if you name man!' Melda shouted. 'You come and move we!'

'You going to suffer the consequences,' Chow turned back to face the women.

'But hear this manicou, nuh?' Jestina laughed. 'But he brass face too bad, oui. Look me tremble, look me!' And she shook her body as Rosehill laughed.

Chow turned away and called to the men on the tractor. They got off the tractor but couldn't move further because the steelband boys had surrounded them and the tractor. Chow swung around and was face to face with Beatrice again.

'You have power now?' she laughed shortly. 'Make them come. Make them come like you.'

'I see is trouble you want in this place!' he hissed.

The steelband boys began to beat on the tractor, jamming the men against the metal. One of them suddenly saw an opening, dashed for it, and the other followed him down the hill. Rosehill let them run.

'That house coming down today if I have to move it myself,' Chow, shaking with anger, spat the words at Beatrice, and pushing her out of the way, he tried to step past her.

'Don't you ever put your nasty hand in my face again!' Beatrice hissed, and the words were hardly out of her mouth before she had raised the bucket. Willy and Valmon lifted their sticks. Beatrice shouted, 'Stay back, Uncle Willy,' and before they could move, Beatrice, in one swift movement, flung the bucket of liquid in the doctor's face. The doctor screamed as liquid spattered on to his clothes, dripped to the earth, and singed it. Beatrice raised the bucket again and hit him on the head, and she raised it again to hit him again but Willy grabbed her arm and held her down as Valmon and the other men kept the women back.

You Alone are Dancing

Brenda Flanagan

Threatened by land speculators and ignored by a corrupt and uncaring government, the people of Roseville begin afight for survival. In the midst of this struggle, Sonny and Beatrice, burdedned by the community's expectations and their own ambitions, have to work out their comittments to each other.

Set on the fictional island of Santabella, *You Alone are Dancing* is a lyrical ballad woven from the villager's collective voices, though when a grievous wrong is done to Beatrice, she discovers the harsh truth of the novel's title.

Every character lives and breathes... a captivating novel
Roberta Mock, *Leeds Other Paper*

ISBN 0948833 33 5 £4.95 out now

Chopstix in Mauby

new

marina ama omowale maxwell

Djuna is not prepared to accept her role in a society which "limited life to a too sweet, thick, encompassing, unforgiving mauby bitter sweet". She becomes a devotee in the Orisha chappelles, her feeling that she possesses special capacities confirmed when the priestess tells her, "You could be whole... since you have all the energies". Djuna must now discipline her life to the difficult task of controlling the divine forces within her which manifest in possession and trance, and fulfilling her gifts as a healer of broken spirits.

Chopstix in Mauby is a revolutionary, groundbreaking work of magical realism. It reinterprets the history of African Caribbean struggle and cultural survival through profoundly womanist and ecological concerns. Above all, it is about the "birth of woman time" as it traces Djuna's journey towards self-realisation and choice.

ISBN 0948833 96 3 £6.95 out now

An extract from Chopstix in Mauby
by marina ama omowale maxwell

After Sabinamama's gouging, all the husbands in the place began to pint on their wives, following them, questioning them as if in the interest of their safety. They could take the horn but it was the echo. A lot of the men felt that something went down with their wives now and again. But is when the noise reached the market that they wanted to kill them, for then it was really true. Smoke always meant fire. Shepherd began to put circles around Djuna.

'Why you so late?'

'Where yo went Saturday, all afternoon?'

'Who is the little guy who helping you gather the herbs?'

'What you doin' wid Obie seed... you treating somebody?'

'Yo doan cook on time again, eh?'

'Dey is calling you a witch, but I eh fraid yo! My magic stronger dan yours!'

'She stretched her body on the rocks, tightened all her body against him and threw up a mist of light around her he couldn't penetrate.

One night he tried to beat her. Her arm twisted out of the socket. Then he felt that he had to kill her and Gawd would forgive him for ridding the town of an evil person. He began to set his traps. But she stepped over all of them. Co-see, co-see, ah see you comin' wid the glint of my eye... co-see, co-see...

On the twenty-third night she heard him beating up in his room, slashing and cutting and growling and calling her to come in to him. She lay quiet, quiet in the little room she now inhabited with her bottles and baths. He mashed up everything in the house, swearing like a heathen and smashing anything he could hold. She came to the door.

'And you is a Shepherd?' she said.

His eyes were rolling in his head, froth was at the corner of his lips, salt white against his black face. He was going grey with rage, all the rich melongene purple in his skin chalked and buried.

'Gawd send me a challangé and a sufferin to overcome!' he screamed, lunging at the door where only space was and he heard her footfalls in the night disappearing towards the sea.

He smelt the acrid smoke of the boiling pots that trailed after her leaving. In the distance moving he saw the mist of light dodging through the trees like a meteor of fireflies, the tail of a comet curving to fade... a shower of sparks, gone...

They found her nightgown on the seashore next morning and the village wept.

Web of Secrets new
Denise Harris

"I am Margaret Saunders... call me the eavesdropper..."

No-one tells Margaret anything openly — about what has happened to her father, about the cancer taking over her mother's body and why her grandmother starts seeing faces pressing through invisible cracks in her bedroom wall. So, with an intuitive sense that uncovering the truth will free the household from its bondage, Margaret starts hiding in cupboards and under beds. But as an "over-imaginative" 14 year old who is, in her family's view, refusing to grow up, she is acutely vulnerable to feeling that she is in some way responsible for what she uncovers...

Set in 1960's Guyana , *Web of Secrets* embroiders a dazzling fabric of whispered family conversations, fantasy and Guyanese folklore. It warns of the psychic hazards of trying to suppress the past and proclaims the redemptive power of truth.

ISBN 0948833 87 4 £6.95 out now

An Extract from *Web of Secrets*

a novel by Denise Harris

Chapter Twenty-Eight

He hit my mother right across her face. His fingers splashed themselves right across her face like a spatula. He hit her again as if once wasn't enough, just like in the movies when you drag out a drowning person from the water and try to resuscitate them...*slap*... *slap*...

Her head jerked sideways at the suddeness of the blows. At first she just took it, seemed to turn the other cheek, then she sprang at him. My mother sprang up like I had never seen

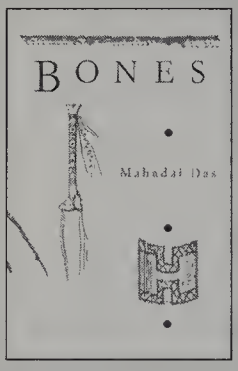
her do before and was never to see her do again. Her eyes were burning bright like I'd never seen them burn before or was never to see them burn again. She clawed at his face, raking her fingernails downwards alongside his cheek... Oh my mother burned bright.

His face fell back at the suprise of it, his skin singed by the burst of flame. My mother burned bright for a few minutes and then began to sputter, but she rose up again and sprang again. He ducked his head and she caught the top of his head. Her fingers raked through his scalp. The blood leaked onto his forehead, down his cheek, onto his collar. She sputtered again, and in the sputtering, in the fight to burn bright, her body seemed to lose control. She frothed at the eyes, frothed at the mouth. She began to claw at the air, she dragged her nails along the wall... her body dragged downwards alongside the wall. She attempted to rise but fell back... She attempted again but fell lower... She attempted again but this time fell onto the floor... Her fingers raked the polish off the floor. She finally sputtered out. My mother, who burned bright like I had never seen her do before, sputtered out like I had never seen her do before. Washed up in her tearsuds and spitsuds.

'What happened to your face?' they asked him.

'A cat scratched it,' he replied.

Bones
Mahadai Das



This richly metaphoric and sensuous collection explores such themes as the act of writing as a woman, love and love denied, illness, the third world woman's experience of urban America and the problematic nature of identity for an Indo-Guyanese woman in exile. Several of the poems explore experience at the extremes, but throughout the collection the stripped bones sing their buoyant images of resurrection.

Mahadai Das was born in Guyana which she left in the early 80s. She was studying philosophy at the University of Chicago when severe illness interrupted her academic career. Her previous publications include, *I Want To Be A Poetess of My People* and *My Finer Steel Will Grow.*

ISBN 0 948833 23 8 £3.95 out now

A Poem by Mahadai Das

taken from the collection ***Bones***

Bones

Grotesque jewels, they hang
in my closet beside prom dresses
and red pumps.

When petticoats are sleeping,
they continue to jangle.
They make a strange noise.
Moonlight shadows their gauntness.
Pumps and brogues are blind to their squeals.

Veils thin to a fringe on their bony blades.
They could tell a tale.
They want a say, without doubt.

Long ago, they were supply fleshed.
But then, all meat fell away
from the bone. Some teeth
and hair remained.
Someone should examine their story.
After all, it's not that they dwindled
into dust altogether. Besides,
these bones could make more than music.
They're a fire-tried instrument.

They have no wish to stay in the attic.
They want to be part of the world.

Oh they are hungry for wind to sing
through their tissue, so hungry.
They wait for the earth at the plough.

After winter's fallowness
and all its severity,
when earth is torn up
by the diligent farmers,
when golden seedlings
offer
love to their heavens,
they wait without praise or reprimand.

So when these white flutes
send a note out – a golden apple
from the Mexican border – it takes to air,

full shape climbing,
  rising

helium balloon forever.

Mahadai Das

Sastra & Butterfly in the Wind

Two novels by Lakshmi Persaud

Butterfly in the Wind

Lakshmi Persaud

From early in her life Kamla is surprised by a contrary inner voice which frequently gainsays the wisdom of her elders and betters. But Kamla is growing up in a traditional Hindu community and attending schools in colonial Trinidad where rote learning is still the order of the day. She learns that this voice creates nothing but trouble and silences it. In this book the voice is freed.

Set in the 1940s, *Butterfly in the Wind* was enthusiastically received when it first appeared in 1990. Its portrayal of a passage from childhood to young womanhood was praised by *The Sunday Times* as "a sweet-natured book which is above all a tremendous celebration of life". *The Observer* praised it for "the empathy with which Lakshmi Persaud writes of the natural world ... and Hindu customs". *India Weekly* wrote that Lakshmi Persaud "maintains the high tradition of Indian Caribbean writing set by V. S. Naipaul", and *Time Out* found it "packed with memories of everday life from family relationships to schoolday traumas".

ISBN 0948833 36 X £5.95 reprint available now

Sastra

Lakshmi Persaud

The pundit warns Sastra's mother that her daughter's birth signs foretell two possible *karmas*, one of prosperous security if she keeps to the well-tried path, the other of mixed joy and misery if she should attempt to 'fly'.

Set in Trinidad, *Sastra* is a moving and tender love story, a rich evocation of the village world and a memorable portrayal of a brave young woman who never tries to evade or complain about the consequences of her choice.

'A beautiful, moving and inspiring novel.'

The Trinidad Guardian

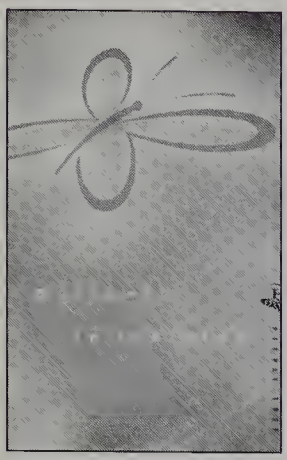
'One of the novel's most striking qualities is the assurance with which it registers inner turbulence. It often suggests a web of feeling that trembles within a framework of courtesies.'

Mervyn Morris

ISBN 0 948833 71 8 £5.95 out now

A Review of *Sastra* by Pamela Beshoff

this review appeared first in The Weekly Gleaner



Lakshmi Persaud's new book *Sastra*, like her first novel, Butterfly in the Wind, is set in colonial Trinidad.

It is a context with which the readers of Caribbean literature is already familiar, from Vidia Naipaul's *House for Mr. Biswas* , Ralph Boissiere's *Rum and Cola*, Alfred Mendes' *Pitch Lake* and C.L.R. James' *Minty Alley*.

Comparisons are invidious but inevitable and in this case do the author no harm. True, there is not the cutting, often cruel observation of Naipaul, nor political message of de Boissiere and James, nor the dark drama of Mendes but there is a quality to this writing which makes it perfectly capable of bearing comparison with the best of the existing Trinidadian literary canon.

Butterfly in the Wind was a beautifully written record of a child's observations, both actual and intellectual, yet betraying a sharp witness of politics and society. *Sastra* is a very different book, the unashamed romance of a young Hindu girl bound by the conventions of her religion and family, struggling to be free to go on her own rather than take the preordained path of marriage to the handsome son of family friends.

There is no violence, nor hatred, nor are there any horrors of any kind in this book.

At times this might have seemed a weakness, the story verging on the sentimental rather than the reality of everyday life. But there is always a pragmatism which prevents this from happening.

Lakshmi Persaud tells the stories of women who have their own feelings about romance, who cook – there are some wonderful evocations of the spices and the preparation of various dishes – who bring up children, guide the family and often work in the shop.

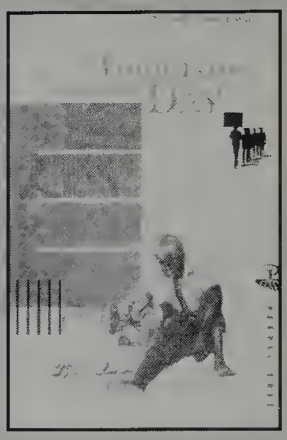
The views of this particular group are seldom, if ever, given voice.

In both these books they can be heard, not with the blare of trumpets, but with a subtlety that increases their impact. Lakshmi Persaud has given us a key with which to unlock a window upon Indo-Trinidadian life which has hitherto remained closed.

It is a fascinating discovery.

Lakshmi Persaud was born and raised in Trinidad. She studied in Ireland, obtaining an Honours Degree at Queen's University in Belfast and a Post-graduate Diploma in Education at Reading University. After teaching for several years in the Caribbean she obtained her Doctorate at Queen's University. She has worked as a teacher all over the Caribbean. She later became a freelance journalist, writing for various magazines and newspapers. She is married with three children, and currently lives in Trinidad.

Tomorrow is Another Day
Narmala Shewcharan



They were all beggars at the gate, thinks Asha, as she joins the vast queue for visas outside the American Embassy.

In a corrupt, seedy dictatorship, whose citizens feel *It's a prison outside too*, what else is there to do? But the option of escape is not open to, or desired by all. There are other choices to be made.

Should Jagru quit the opposition and try to influence the ruling party from within? When will Manu's luck with smuggling run out? Where is Lal's duty? With his family or fighting the Government? Is Chandi's concern with her children enough? Without imposing easy judgements, Narmala Shewcharan takes us inside the choices her characters make, and their price.

This skilfully constructed novel movingly portrays the human costs of social fragmentation, but also asserts the moral basis of community in the impact each individual choice has on the lives of others.

Narmala Shewcharan was born in Guyana where she worked as a journalist. She now lives in Britain.

ISBN 0948833 47 5 £6.95 out now

Tomorrow is Another Day
A review by Amina Gafoor

Narmala Shewcharan can be considered the first female novelist to have emerged from the Indian diaspora in this former British colony. It has taken more than one hundred and fifty years for a woman from the indentured and colonised canefarming and ricefarming immigrant stock to begin to flourish creatively through the novel and to take her place in the literary arts which probe or illuminate the core of human experience. Shewcharan is a welcome addition given the dearth of Guyanese women writers.

This fictional work recreates an abyss of human experience. It offers glimpses of individual lives caught in the social and political convulsions of the day. The novel refrains from naming a particular society or identifying a period of time. The work mentions the United Workers Party and its Headquarters (where the opposition struggle takes place), the Official Party and the Secretariat (according to one of the characters, "a political jungle"), the hospital, the market, the prison cell, (a virtual torture chamber – the ultimate scene

of the de-humanisation of the individual) and, of course, the society itself which is a cage or "open prison". Some Guyanese readers may see it as a thinly-disguised work of an all too familiar, well-remembered scenario. And yet this fictional work would be relevant in any society where abuse of power leads to the victimisation and needless sacrifice of its people. If the reader can recognise himself or relate scenes and institutions around him in this work, then the work has succeeded, for one of the functions of serious art is to hold up a mirror to society wherein man can see himself. The interpretation of the work is its engagement with the reader.

The structure of Narmala Shewcharan's novel is clever – a happy fusion of content and form. Like the complex web of human relationships it seeks to portray, its episodes are spun and spaced with purpose like the patterns of a spider's web, with bases held together by tenuous links, each point in the web locating and probing dichotomies of human existence and social interaction. The dénouement becomes, not an unravelling or happy clarifying of situations, but the sudden and late realisation of being caught in the web, of coming face to face with the seductive monster which none is able to touch and from which one must fall away with deep disillusionment and disappointment, often at the price of life and the fragmentation of the family. This work is almost a fulfilment of Martin Carter's worst fears contained in these now famous lines: "Like a jig/ shakes the loom./ Like a web/Is spun the pattern/all are involved/ all are consumed!' (*Poems of Resistance*, 1954).

The helplessness of the poor, the dilemma of the idealistic, the wilfulness of those who hold power, the urge to escape a corrupt and repressive dictatorship and, more shockingly, the underbelly of politics with its inevitable intrigues, have never been more starkly presented than in Shewcharan's novel. Two men choose different paths to seek the same ideal. Each believes he can influence the order of things and make a meaningful contribution to the party of his choice in order to better the lot of the suffering masses and redeem them from the demoralising morass in which the society is bogged down.

These choices have a traumatic impact on their own lives and on the lives of their loved ones. Alienation, estrangement, scapegoatism, tragedy and trauma have become the hallmark of the modern Guyanese novel. Anxieties, homelessness, painful separation and loss are narrated with sympathy in Shewcharan's novel. Yet it is not only the government that stands indicted. The chief engineer of the downfall of the protagonist and, consequently, of this small group of individuals, is an astute, vindictive and shadowy, Iago-type character of the opposition ranks who, ironically turns around and befriends the victims when they are down. There seems to be a worm in every rose and only the novel has the power and authority to explore aspects of human nature and human experience with this incisive perceptiveness.

Almost all the characters in this work show resolute determination in their struggle to survive. They all, in varying degrees, suffer disillusionment and victimisation, but the female characters stand out for the great strength of purpose which they exhibit, their vision and resolve to keep the family unit intact at all cost and for their communion and solidarity with each other. There is Aunt Adee, who has lost a son in the political struggle... "it was people like her who gave the lie to stories of racial unrest"... the independent woman struggling to make a living, sleeping

on a stall in the market with dozens of plastic bags pinned about her. Then there is Kunti, the good Samaritan and comfort to those in distress. And there is Chandini who soldiers on despite her adversities and summons strength out of her fragility and whose only purpose in life is to meet the uncertain tomorrows her five children wake up to each day.

The feminine principal is celebrated in this novel but not romanticised. Positive images of women are drawn with realism. For example, Chandini "remembered too well her own shattered dreams because even though her father was a headteacher, she had lived in a village where they did not believe in women wasting time on books". Her husband, fired with idealistic zeal, relinquishes job and family to work as a voluntary "organiser" with the opposition party, but Chandini never fully reveals her anguish to him.

In the end, after his ordeal in prison, the scapegoat Jagru seeks out Aunt Adee in the market: "She took his hand and he allowed himself to be led. He became aware that children were staring at them and giggling. Two freaks, he thought. Two more mad people to join the crowd. He began to laugh himself, almost without pause... (He) continued to laugh and Aunt Adee joined him, thinking that his laughter as a free man was a happy sound". The truth is that Jagru laughs to keep from crying. *Tomorrow Is Another Day* is an important contribution both to the West Indian and the Guyanese literary archive. This novel is a testimony to the beliefs, the myths, the rituals, the reality and the dreams that make society either functional or disfunctional. It has clear socio-historical relevance to the postcolonial societies of our region.

I'll let Jagru have the last word. Thoroughly disgusted by his experience in the prison, Jagru thinks (of the other inmates) "They were like animals in a cage, the men across from him. How they had come to be so perverted and sadistic, so merciless in their dealings with their fellow human beings, he would not speculate. Whatever, they had no right to walk with the civilised and their place was rightfully behind bars... But at least these men did not hide what they were, unlike the men in suits and ties who sat behind their desks and inflicted suffering on the masses in order to feed their egos – and their bank balances. They were animals, too, but in disguise, predators who ripped out the guts of their fellow creature's dreams".

This novel has been written with honesty, integrity and brutal frankness.

Narmala Shewcharan

A Guide to Further Reading

There are several general collections of critical essays which deal with Caribbean and Black British Women's writing. These include: ed. Carole Boyce Davies, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Africa World Press, 1990; ed. Joan Anim-Addo, *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing*, Whiting & Birch, 1996.

There is an Association of Caribbean Writers and Scholars which publishes a journal, MaComère, and holds international conferences. Contact: ACWWS: Tanya Saunders, Director, Office of International Programs, Ithaca College, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850, USA.

In the UK, the Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance publishes a termly newsletter, *Mango Season* and holds annual conferences. Contact: Joan Anim-Addo, Caribbean Centre, Goldsmith's College, New Cross, London SE14 6NW.

There are no doubt other Caribbean Women Writer's organisations, please do let us know of them and add Peepal Tree to any mailing lists.

ANTHOLOGIES

ed. P. Mordecai & Betty Wilson, *Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Caribbean Women's Writing*

Eds. Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins, *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain*

FICTION

Erna Brodber, *Myal*
Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home
Louisiana

Jean Buffong, *Under the Silk Cotton Tree*
Jump-up-and-Kiss-Me
Snowflakes in the Sun

Joan Cambridge, *Clarise Cumberbatch Wants to Go Home*

Merle Collins, *Angel*
Rain Darling
The Colour of Forgetting

Maryse Condé, *A Season in Rihata*

Christine Craig, *Mint Tea and Other Stories*

Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory, Forgetting*

Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb*
In Times Like These

Beryl Gilroy, *Frangipani House*
Boy-Sandwich

Lorna Goodison, *Baby Mother and the King of Swords*

Merle Hodge, *Crick-Crack Monkey*
For the Life of Laetitia

Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*
Lucy
The Autobiography of My Mother

Pauline Melville, *Shape-Shifter*

Grace Nichols, *Whole of a Morning Sky*

Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Harriet's Daughter*

Velma Pollard, *Karl and Other Stories*
Homestretch

Patricia Powell, *Me Dying Trial*
A Small Gathering of Bones

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*
After Leaving Mr McKenzie

Joan Riley, *Waiting in the Twilight*
The Unbelonging
Romance
A Kindness to Children

Olive Senior, *Summer Lightning*
The Arrival of the Snake Woman

Vanessa Spence, *The Roads Are Down*

POETRY

Jean Binta Breeze, *Spring Cleaning*

Louise Bennett, *Jamaica Labrish*

Lorna Goodison, *I am Becoming My Mother*
Heartease

Marlene Nourbese Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue*

Olive Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*

Index of titles & ordering information

Title	*Author*	**ISBN*	*Price*	*Page*
A Light Left On	Manley, Rachel	55 6	£4.95	14-15
Bones	Das, Mahadai	23 8	£3.95	28-29
Butterfly in the Wind	Persaud, Lakshmi	36 X	£5.95	30-31
Chopstix in Mauby	maxwell, marina	96 3	£6.95	25-26
Coming Home and other Stories	Henfrey, June	67 X	£5.95	18-19
Crown Point and other Poems	Pollard, Velma	24 6	£4.95	16-17
Gather the Faces	Gilroy, Beryl	88 2	£5.95	10
Inkle and Yarico	Gilroy, Beryl	98 X	£6.95	11
In Praise of Love and Children	Gilroy, Beryl	89 0	£6.95	10
Sastra	Persaud, Lakshmi	71 8	£5.95	30-31
Shame Trees Don't Grow Here	Pollard, Velma	48 3	£4.95	16-17
Singerman	Campbell, Hazel	44 0	£4.95	12-13
Song of the Boatwoman	Jin, Meiling	86 6	£6.95	22-23
Sunlight on Sweet Water	Gilroy, Beryl	64 5	£5.95	6-7,11
The Last English Plantation	Shinebourne, Janice	13 0	£4.95	21
Timepiece	Shinebourne, Janice	03 3	£4.50	20-21
Tomorrow is Another Day	Schewcharan, Narmala	47 5	£6.95	32-34
Web of Secrets	Harris, Denise	87 4	£6.95	27-28
You Alone are Dancing	Flanagan, Brenda	33 5	£4.95	24-25

* All ISBN's share the prefix 0–948833–

All Peepal Tree books are available from your local bookseller, you can also order direct from us using the pull-out order form in the centre of this booklet, prices are also given in Canadian and US dollars for overseas customers. UK orders should arrive in one week, overseas orders take two weeks. Trade Ordering information is on the back cover.

Peepal Tree Press 17 King's Avenue, Leeds LS6 1QS, United Kingdom
tel. 44 (0)113 245 1703 *fax.* 44 (0)113 246 8368
email (enquiries & sales) **hannah@peepal.demon.co.uk**
(editorial) **jeremy@peepal.demon.co.uk**

Peepal Tree is an independent publishing house bringing you the very best in Caribbean, South Asian and Black British fiction, poetry and literary studies.

Peepal Tree has over seventy titles in print. Write, fax or phone for a free copy of our full catalogue.

UK/Europe trade orders:

Central Books
99 Wallis Road
London E9 5LN tel. 44 (0)171 986 4854
United Kingdom fax 44 (0)171 533 5821

Individual and all other trade orders:

Peepal Tree Press
17 King's Avenue tel. 44 (0)113 245 1703
Leeds LS6 1QS fax 44 (0)113 246 8368
United Kingdom email: hannah@peepal.demon.co.uk

Funded by THE ARTS COUNCIL OF ENGLAND

FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE • FREE